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U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, of Highland Park, joined with Navy, Veterans Affairs officials and local veterans Monday to break ground on the start of a new \$100 million joint Navy/VA hospital.

The first part of the project will be a \$16 million parking garage, new site entrance and intersection at Green Bay Road, paving the way for the new large ambulatory care center scheduled for construction next year.

"This is the start of building my dream--a new \$100 million state-of-the-art Navy-Veterans hospital that ensures veterans health care will always be the best in northern Illinois," said Kirk.

Once completed, the joint VA/Navy hospital will improve health care for more than 50,000 veterans, 40,000 sailors, 30,000 dependents and 10,000 military retirees living in northern Illinois. The facility will share doctors and services for more efficient and cutting-edge health care.

Kirk was joined at the ceremony by North Chicago Mayor Leon Rockingham, Capt. Robert Gibbs, commander, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Capt. Thomas McGue, commanding officer, Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes, Patrick Sullivan, medical center director, North Chicago VA, Johnnie Allen, Lake County Veterans Assistance Commission superintendent, Mick Peck, incoming Lake County Veteran Assistance Commission superintendent and local veterans.

In 2001, Kirk set the goal of saving the VA by combining it with a new naval hospital. In 2003, Kirk won approval for the first phase of the integration project, moving the Navy's mental health unit into the North Chicago VA. Last year, Kirk participated in the opening of a \$13 million joint Navy/VA emergency room and surgical facility.

Phase 3 begins with the construction of the parking facility, and the project will end with the final completion of the ambulatory care addition to the VA Medical Center. The facility is expected to open in 2010 with a total cost of approximately \$130 million.